

The Transition to Kindergarten for Children with and without Special Needs: Identification of Family Experiences and Involvement

Binnur Yıldırım Hacıbrahimogluⁱ
Giresun University

Abstract

The transition to kindergarten is one of the significant transition steps for children in early childhood. The family, being the closest circle of the child, supports the development of the child in the transition and affects the transition process with its resources and needs. In this regard, this study examined the experiences and participation of families of children with and without special needs in the transition to kindergarten. This study is a survey research in which family experiences and involvement in the transition to kindergarten are determined. The Family Experiences and Involvement in Transition questionnaire was used to assess family involvement in transition preparation activities and transition concerns during kindergarten entry. A total of 232 parents participated in the study. Research results show that both family groups are most concerned with are similar. The research identifies the situation that families are most concerned about as getting used to a new school. Whether they have a child with disabilities or not, the types of information that both family groups prefer were similar. In the transition process, families especially favoured meetings and visits as the types of family involvement. Upon discussing the findings in line with the relevant literature, this study makes suggestions for further research and applications.

Keywords: Transition to Kindergarten, Transition, Parent Involvement, Family Experiences, Family Concerns, Preschool

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ⁱ **Binnur Yıldırım Hacıbrahimoglu**, Assist. Prof. Dr., Special Education, Giresun University, ORCID: 0000-0002-6471-6054

Email: binnury@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

The transition to kindergarten is a crucial life process for children wherein they can feel both excited and slightly sad, and is presented as a new setting in which families also experience similar feelings (Kielty, Passe & Mayle, 2013). Griebel & Niesel (2009) described the transition to school as a critical process particularly for the child, teacher and family in which the social environment, roles and identities of individuals change. Similarly, Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) described early childhood transitions as a ‘delicate process’ for further academic success. Therefore, the studies in the transition to the new educational environment will support the successful adaptation of the child and his/her family as soon as possible (Janus et al., 2007).

Studies suggest that the comfortable and successful transition brings about long-lasting positive results in the development of the child, affects the child's school performance and lets the child adapt to school more quickly; whereas a difficult and negative transition, by complicating the child's adaptation to school, affects the education process of children who are in the risk group of having disabilities or diagnosed with disabilities, especially in academic and social fields (McIntyre, Blacher & Baker, 2006; Stormont et al., 2005; Yeboah, 2002). In the transition to an educational environment with inclusive practices, the transition is considered to be a more stressful process for children with special needs (CSN), their families and professionals, as the expectations of the receiving school for CSN and their families increase, and the transition process includes many changes (Chadwick & Kemp, 2002; Rosenkoetter, Hains & Dogaru, 2007). It is stated that children and families may experience high stress due to the discontinuities between the previous educational environment and kindergarten (DeCaro & Worthman, 2011; Gill, Winters & Friedman, 2006; McGettigan & Gray, 2012). Families, particularly with children with disabilities, are more anxious in terms of behaviour, communication and general readiness in the transition to kindergarten than families with typically developing children (CTD) (McIntyre et al., 2010). Therefore, it is stated that the transition process should not be considered as a change only for the child; it is a change that includes the situations, structures and individuals surrounding the children that will affect them directly or indirectly (McIntyre et al., 2007; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). In the transition process, the family, in particular, plays an important role in providing information to the teacher about the areas where the child is adequate and inadequate (Kang, Horn & Palmer, 2017). Cooperation of families as having the role of informant, with school and school teachers will support the child's transition to kindergarten.

Kochhar-Bryant (2008) stated that different reactions in the transition to kindergarten may be experienced, and this process can become more difficult and complex especially for children with disabilities and their families. A more successful transition of the child and family should be supported with practices that encourage family participation. It has been revealed that the positive relationship between the child's general adjustment, academic outcomes and practices in the transition process is mediated by the active involvement of families (Schulting, Malone & Dodge, 2005). For this reason, it is seen that family involvement practices that will support communication and cooperation between home and school are important in the transition process.

Transition and family involvement

Family involvement is a process in which mothers, fathers and other family members participate in the relevant education programme in order to contribute to the education and development of children in early childhood (Morrison, 2013). Family involvement is essential for supporting the academic and social-emotional development of children in early childhood (Clarkin-Phillips & Carr, 2012; Kluczniok et al., 2013; Wilder, 2014). Families are not only teachers of children but also partners of educators. Parents' understanding of their children is valuable for teachers when planning their learning experience. Similarly, teachers can contribute to parents in getting to know their children since they get to know the children in a different environment. Therefore, these roles of parents and teachers will enable the child to benefit from the education offered at the highest level (Danielson, 2002; Keçeli-Kaysılı, 2008). Research findings show that when parents and teachers

work collaboratively to support the children, the children are more prepared to start school and experience a more successful school transition (Pianta et al., 1999; Puccioni, Froiland & Moeyaert, 2020; Schulting, Malone & Dodge, 2005).

Family involvement is an important social resource for children in coping with stress during the transition to school, and it is a strong and reliable determinant of adjustment to school. Family involvement improves the family–child relationship and the learning environment at home and positively affects the developmental areas and basic academic skills of the child, thus facilitating a smooth school transition (Lau, 2014). During the transition period, the adaptation of the child and family to the new educational environment is the most obvious effect of transition success. Fulfilling the responsibilities of the environment in which the child is present and the communication and behavioural skills displayed are the indicators of child adaptation, and the active involvement of the family in the services, planning, decisions, communication and cooperation are indicators of family adaptation (Rous et al., 2007). In terms of CSN, family involvement that includes the quality and interaction between family and professionals plays a role in the children gaining a strong and effective educational experience (Dockett & Perry, 2004; Stoner et al., 2007), and it helps the child to adapt to school better (Giallo et al., 2008). With regard to children with disabilities, families contribute significantly to the transition process as they provide the teacher with information about the child, support the teaching of the skills necessary for the inclusion environment and defend the child’s rights (Chadwick & Kemp, 2002). Family also experience adaptation process to a new environment, and change in roles and responsibilities as well as children with or without special need (Lau, 2014; Yeboah, 2002). Studies should be organised to prepare both the family and the child for the new educational environment during the transition period to minimise the problems caused by these changes (Lau, 2014; Yeboah, 2002). To have sufficient and well-equipped knowledge about the child in the transition period, it is necessary to establish a connection with the family and the family to know about the new environment for the child and themselves. It is important for the family to take part in transition activities to prepare the child for school, and it is necessary to work with an expert on activities that will contribute to the child’s learning, especially in the home environment. For a healthy transition, it is vital that families attend the transition meetings regularly and state their problems and needs (Rous, Myers & Striclin, 2007).

When the researches regarding transition studies are examined, sending written records that will cover all kinds of information about the child to the receiving programme, the teacher in the receiving programme meeting with the family and the child before the school starts, meeting with the family before and after the school starts, home visits and sending letters, the child visiting the receiving programme, the receiving programme’s teacher visiting the sending programme, organising frequent meetings, activities to strengthen family participation, activities for the preparation of the child and the receiving and sending programmes sharing information are the most frequently used transition activities (Ahtola et al., 2011; Broström, 2002; Daley, Munk & Carlson, 2011; La Paro, Pianta & Cox, 2000; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; McIntyre et al., 2010; Rous et al., 2010).

The transition in Turkey during the early childhood period

Transition studies in Turkey are quite a new issue. Transition recently started to be discussed in the field of special education and the field of early childhood education, mostly under the name of school adjustment. There is no implementation and legal regulation for transition and transition services in the country (Bakkaloğlu, 2013; Yıldırım Hacıbrahimoğlu, 2017); but in the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) Special Education Services Regulation (2018) provides arrangements for children with special needs. In the Special Education Services Regulation (2018), the educational evaluation, diagnosis and monitoring process section regarding transition is in Article 9 under the heading of ‘Transition between levels’. It is stated that in cooperation with the school guidance service in line with the planning of the Guidance Research Centre, the necessary measures are taken regarding the student’s adaptation to the school and access to education, and the practice is followed (MoNE, 2018). In the 11th Article of the regulation, it is stated that preschool education is compulsory for children with special education needs who have completed 36 months, and the education period can be

extended in the preschool period, taking into account the development and characteristics of the children (MoNE, 2018).

As of the 2006–2007 academic year in Turkey one week before the schools start, an implementation of adjustment programmes is organised for kindergarten and the primary school first grade students to clear their concerns, to popularise the school environment, to familiarise them with the educational environment, the teachers and friends through games, drama and sports activities. MoNE regulated the school adaptation program as two days as of 2019-2020. In the scope of this program, MoNE presented to teachers an sample of this program and indicated significant points. Within the scope of this programme, children's meeting activities, meeting activities for families, introducing learning centres/departments of the school, introducing classroom rules, and getting to know the school and its employees were presented as sample activities to the adjustment programme. In the framework of this programme, it is envisaged that teachers should do their own unique activities; the school's facilities and conditions and student characteristics should be taken into account for the implementation of the adjustment programme (MoNE, 2020).

Current study

As can be seen, there is no specifically planned implementation in the legal regulations regarding the transition for children, whether they have disabilities or not. Since the implementation or regulation articles do not include an effective transition team, calendar, planned education for the child, transition activities, family participation, inter-institutional cooperation and communication, it does not have the feature of a systematic transition practice; therefore, they cannot be considered as effective transition practices. As Bakkaloğlu (2013) stated, the transition to school, especially for CSN, is carried out with the individual efforts of families.

MoNE (2021) statistical data reveals that there is a total of 673,313 students at the kindergarten level and the number of inclusive students in preschool education were 549. (MoNE, 2020). As indicated in the MoNE (2021) report, although the number of students in preschool education has decreased compared to previous years, due to the optionality of pre-school education and the Covid-19 outbreak, this number partially reflects the number of students who will transition to primary school. These data are thought to be important in establishing a planned transition program. It can be considered as a preliminary study in the individualization of transition programs to be created in relevant schools, especially according to student characteristics. At the same time, when we consider the families of these children based on the number of students, it is seen that a large group will take part in the transition to school. Therefore, there is a need for activities and practices that will facilitate the adaptation of families to the new educational environment.

Since there is no systematic transition practice and legal process covering the implementation and effectiveness directly related to the transition in Turkey, there is a deficiency for information on the experience of families in transition, their requirements and what kind of involvement they desire. As a result of this information, it is believed that through the organisation of necessary practices and studies, the transition to school and the adaptation process will be more successful for all children, families and teachers. It is thought that determining the transition practices and participation types preferred by families will contribute to the field of early childhood education and early childhood special education. It is expected to be a guide for future transition policies and practices. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the experiences and involvement of families of children with and without disabilities in transition to kindergarten. For this purpose, a) what are the concerns of families in transition to kindergarten? b) what are the needs of families and the types of family involvement they want in the transition to kindergarten?

METHOD

This study is a survey research in which family experiences and involvement in the transition to kindergarten are determined. Survey research describes the views towards and characteristics of a subject and determines the situation (Büyüköztürk et al., 2008).

Participants

The research was conducted with 27 kindergartens in eight primary schools, which were determined through convenience sampling from kindergartens affiliated to the MoNE. Early childhood education in Turkey is implemented in independent kindergartens, kindergartens incorporated into elementary schools, and practice classes. All of these are connected to the MoNE. Children aged 57–68 months are enrolled as of the end of the enrolment month of September in kindergarten classes within the primary school. Kindergartens within the primary school consist of children who will start primary school in the next academic year. Children who complete 69 months of age at the end of September of the enrolment year are enrolled in the first grade of primary schools. School directorates direct the 69, 70 and 71-month-old children who are eligible to enrol in primary school to kindergarten education or postpone their enrolment to primary school for one year, upon the written request from their parents (MoNE, 2014).

After the schools were selected, the following conditions were taken into account for the parents during the formation of the study group: a) Having a child aged 57–68 months, b) having their child attend an early childhood education programme in the previous year and c) volunteering to participate in the research. Within the scope of the research, forms were sent to 390 families. In 18 surveys, only the demographics and a few other items were answered, and those surveys were therefore excluded. The study included 232 parents, 204 mothers (87.9%) and 28 fathers (12.1%) (see Table 1). When the demographic characteristics of the children were examined, forms were filled out for 123 (53%) girls and 109 (47%) boys. The average age of the children is 61.83 months. A total of 54 (23.3%) children, including 21 girls and 33 boys, were found to have a disability diagnosis. The diagnoses that children have were determined as—intellectual disabilities (n = 15), autism spectrum disorder (n = 9), language and speech disorder (n = 9), learning disability (n = 9), attention deficit and *hyperactivity* disorder (n = 7), chronic disease (asthma, epilepsy) (n = 3), cerebral palsy (n = 2) and developmental delay (n = 2). Four parents with CSN stated that their child did not receive any specific educational support.

Table 1. Parent demographic characteristics (n= 232)

Variable		CSN	CTD	Total N (%)
Respondent	Mother	47 (87)	204 (87.9)	157 (88.2)
	Father	7 (13)	28 (12.1)	21 (11.8)
Employment status	Yes	17 (31.5)	123 (53)	90 (50.6)
	No	37 (68.5)	109 (47)	88 (49.4)
Educational degree status	High school	27 (50)	66 (28.4)	39 (21.9)
	Associate's degree	11 (20.4)	54 (23.3)	43 (24.2)
	Bachelor's degree	15 (27.8)	108 (46.6)	93 (52.2)
	Post bachelor's (M. A.)	1 (1.9)	4 (1.7)	3 (1.7)

Data collection tool

The research used The Family Experiences and Involvement in Transition (FEIT; McIntyre et al., 2007) questionnaire to determine the experiences and involvement of families in the transition to kindergarten. The FEIT assesses parents' concerns in the transition to kindergarten and family involvement in transition preparation. The questionnaire consists of 72 items, within five domains: a) child educational history (14 items), b) parent concerns regarding the transition to kindergarten (11 items; e.g. academic, behavioural), c) identified needs during the transition to kindergarten (14 items), d) family involvement with the school around kindergarten transition practices (14 items) and e)

family demographic information (19 items). In the section for family involvement in kindergarten transition practices, there were three answer options, consisting of whether they 'have', 'want' or 'don't have or want'. In this section, the items that families state they 'had' reflect their participation in transition practices. The section of family concerns was evaluated with a four-point scale (1: no concerns, 2: a few, 3: some, 4: many concerns). The 'Total Family Transition Concerns' score that families receive from this section varies between 11 and 44 points. Since FEIT is a data collection tool with the feature of a questionnaire, its adaptation to Turkish was handled comprehensively. For this purpose, the English form of the questionnaire was translated into Turkish by two Turkish language experts who are fluent in both languages. For the notable differences between the expert translations, opinions were taken again, and the questionnaire translated into Turkish by the language experts was converted into a single form. The Turkish form was given to two English language experts and translated back into the original language. In the examination, it was observed that the items in the Turkish and English form of the questionnaire had language equivalence. Afterwards, an expert evaluation form was prepared, and the English and Turkish forms of the questionnaire were sent to two academicians who are experts in the field of assessment and evaluation in education and three academicians who are experts in the field of early childhood education. Expert opinion was taken on whether the questionnaire items were suitable for Turkish semantically/conceptually. In line with the opinions and suggestions received from the experts, some changes were made in the questionnaire form, and the questionnaire was finalised. Some questions such as the race of the child and the family, the language spoken at home and the types of education programmes were removed from the survey or changed. For example, since there was no Head Start application it was removed from the form. After all these steps, the 'Pilot Turkish Form' of the FEIT questionnaire was obtained. This approved and finalised form was applied to eight parents who have a good command of English and Turkish and also meet the participant criteria of the study. After the pre-application, the obtained information was examined by the assessment-evaluation specialist and the form was found to be appropriate. Thus, the Turkish form of the FEIT questionnaire was ready.

Data collection process and analysis

The data collection process started in the second week of September for the 2018–2019 academic year and completed in October. To accord with the approval received from the relevant units, the schools selected as the study groups were approached, and the purpose of the study was explained. The preschool educational institutions that agreed to support the study were visited; the researcher was introduced to the teacher of the class where administration was going to be conducted. First of all, children matching the age range in the classroom were identified together with the teachers. After the children were identified, the participation form and questionnaire were sent to the families. After each family who wanted to participate in the study signed the participation form, the survey was carried out on a voluntary basis on a day. Participants were given the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time. Forms coming from families were assigned numbers such as the participant codes of P1, P2. The study used descriptive statistical analysis and a chi-square test regarding families having CSN.

In the study, to examine the relationship between variables, the normality of distributions was examined using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov (KS) test for groups greater than 50 people and the Shapiro–Wilks (SW) test for groups less than 50 people. In the dimension of information that will help families in the transition to kindergarten, the significance values of the items in families with CSN are between $SW = 0.218$ and $SW = 0.530$ and are not normally distributed ($p = 0.000$). In the families of CTD, the significance values of the items vary between $KW = 0.453$ and $KW = 0.535$ and do not show a normal distribution ($p = 0.000$). Considering the family involvement types, the significance values obtained for the items in the families of the CTD vary between $KW = 0.540$ and $KW = 0.373$ points and are not normally distributed ($p = 0.000$). Significance values for items in families of CSN vary between $SW = 0.188$ and $SW = 0.624$ and do not show a normal distribution ($p = 0.000$). The analysis of the research data was completed by using inductive analysis (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018) for the analysis of the open-ended question in the questionnaire. Sample statements of the participants who gave their opinions on each determined theme were included.

RESULTS

This study discussed the experiences and involvement of the families of children with and without disabilities in the transition to kindergarten. For this purpose, it first examined the concerns of families in transition to kindergarten. The total mean score of families with CSN regarding the concerns about the transition to kindergarten was 19.42, and the standard deviation was 6.50. For families with children with typical development (CTD), the total mean score was 16.83, and the standard deviation was 4.75. The Cronbach α internal consistency reliability of the scores obtained in the family concerns section in the transition to kindergarten was calculated as 0.816 for all items. This value shows that the score obtained is highly reliable (Özdamar, 2004). Views on the concerns of families with and without CSN are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Concerns of families with and without CSN

Concern		No concern (1)		A Few (2)		Some (3)		Many concerns (4)		M	SD
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
		Academics	CTD	113	63.5	41	23.0	22	12.4		
	CSN	21	38.9	17	31.5	9	16.7	7	13.0	2.03	1.04
Behavior problems	CTD	111	62.4	40	22.5	23	12.9	4	2.2	1.55	0.80
	CSN	27	50.0	12	22.2	9	16.7	6	11.1	1.88	1.05
Following directions	CTD	119	66.9	41	23.0	16	9.0	2	1.1	1.44	0.70
	CSN	24	44.4	18	33.3	8	14.8	4	7.4	1.85	0.93
Getting along with other children	CTD	99	55.6	41	23.0	34	19.1	4	2.2	1.67	0.85
	CSN	25	46.3	15	27.8	10	18.5	4	7.4	1.87	0.97
Getting along with teacher	CTD	93	52.2	49	27.5	29	16.3	7	3.9	1.71	0.87
	CSN	23	42.6	16	29.6	12	22.2	3	5.6	1.90	0.93
Getting used to a new school	CTD	71	39.9	57	32.0	43	24.2	7	3.9	1.92	0.89
	CSN	20	37.0	15	27.8	16	29.6	3	5.6	2.03	0.95
Child being ready for kindergarten	CTD	97	54.5	48	27.0	28	15.7	5	2.8	1.66	0.84
	CSN	20	37.0	18	33.3	10	18.5	6	11.1	2.03	1.00
Separating from family	CTD	104	58.4	37	20.8	26	14.6	11	6.2	1.68	0.93
	CSN	26	48.1	16	29.6	8	14.8	4	7.4	1.81	0.95
Toilet training	CTD	141	79.2	22	12.4	13	7.3	2	1.1	1.30	0.65
	CSN	43	79.6	5	9.3	4	7.4	2	3.7	1.35	0.78
Ability to communicate needs	CTD	131	73.6	36	20.2	9	5.1	2	1.1	1.33	0.62
	CSN	29	53.7	10	18.5	10	18.5	5	9.3	1.83	1.04
Other concerns	CTD	173	97.2	2	1.1	3	1.7	-	-	1.04	0.27
	CSN	50	92.6	1	1.9	3	5.6	-	-	1.12	0.47

When the concerns of families with CSN are addressed with the answers ‘a few, some and many’, getting used to a new school (63%), the child being ready for kindergarten (62.9%), academics (61.2%), getting along with the teacher (57.4%), following directions (55.5%) and getting along with other children (53.7%) were identified as the first six items that families are concerned about (see Table 2). In the other concern category, the majority of families did not express their opinions, but three parents were found to have some concerns about the child being distracted, being too active and not being able to communicate. When the views of families with CTD are examined, getting used to a new school (63.2%), getting along with the teacher (47.7%), the child being ready for kindergarten (45.5%), getting along with other children (46.6%) and separating from family (41.6%) were identified as the first five items that families are concerned about (see Table 2). In the other concerns category, the majority of families did not express their opinions, but it was found that three parents had some concerns about nutrition, the child not being able to protect themselves and the child being too stubborn.

The second finding of the study is to determine the needs that will help families in the transition to kindergarten. In general, families stated that types of information in the transition planning process will help in the transition. When the views of families with CSN are examined, ‘what

caregiver can do to prepare for transition' (92.6%), 'child's skill' (90.7%), 'child's future/new teacher' (88.9%) and 'how kindergarten is preparing for the transition' (88.9%) items were identified as the most requested types of information. For the families with CTD, the items of 'child's future/new teacher' (91.6%), 'what caregiver can do to prepare for transition child's skills' (89.9%) and 'how kindergarten is preparing for transition' (87.6%) were the most requested types of information (see Table 3). There was no significant relationship between the families' views on the types of information in transition planning and having or not having CSN ($p > .05$).

Table 3. Families indicating they want more information regarding their child's transition to kindergarten

Type of information desired	CSN n (%)	CTD n (%)	χ^2
Preschool program	44 (81.5)	145 (81.5)	0.00
Kindergarten program	47 (87)	151 (84.8)	0.03
Child's skills	49 (90.7)	159 (89.3)	0.00
Child's future/new teacher	48 (88.9)	163 (91.6)	0.11
Child's future/new school	45 (83.3)	153 (86)	0.06
Academic expectations in kindergarten	42 (77.8)	147 (82.6)	0.35
Behavioral expectations in kindergarten	44 (81.5)	154 (86.5)	0.48
How preschool prepared for transition	47(87)	154 (86.5)	0.00
How kindergarten is preparing for transition	48 (88.9)	156 (87.6)	0.00
What caregiver can do to prepare for transition	50 (92.6)	160 (89.9)	0.10
Emotional support/encouragement from school	46 (85.2)	128 (71.9)	3.21
Emotional support/encouragement from family	41 (75.9)	137 (77)	0.00

Another question of the study is to determine the type of family involvement families want in the transition to kindergarten. The items 'visit kindergarten class/elementary school' (97.2%), 'monthly contact with preschool teacher' (94.9%) and 'attend a kindergarten open house' (93.3%) were the most desired family involvement types in the transition by families with CTD. When the opinions of families with CSN are examined, the items, 'attend a kindergarten open house' (96.3%), 'visit kindergarten class/elementary school' (94.4%), 'monthly contact with preschool teacher' (92.6%) and 'attend a kindergarten orientation session' (92.6%) were the family involvement types that families wanted most in the transition process (see Table 4). There was no significant relationship between the families' having or not having CSN and their views on the types of family involvement in the transition ($p > .05$).

Table 4. The types of family involvement families want in the transition process

Type of information desired	CSN n (%)	CTD n (%)	χ^2
Monthly contact with preschool teacher	50 (92.6)	169 (94.9)	0.10
Annual meetings with preschool staff	47 (87)	152 (85.4)	0.06
Attend a transition planning meeting with preschool staff	34 (63)	139 (78.1)	4.23
Attend a transition planning meeting with kindergarten staff	42 (77.8)	147 (82.6)	0.35
Visit kindergarten class/elementary school	51 (94.4)	173 (97.2)	0.29
Member of transition planning team at preschool	32 (59.3)	100 (56.2)	0.05
Attend a transition information meeting at preschool or kindergarten	45 (83.3)	164 (92.1)	2.67
Phone call from kindergarten teacher	43 (79.6)	141 (79.2)	0.00
Home visit from kindergarten teacher	34 (63)	101 (56.7)	0.42
Attend a kindergarten orientation session	50 (92.6)	154 (86.5)	0.92
Receive written communication regarding transition from preschool	38 (70.4)	147 (82.6)	3.10
Receive written communication regarding transition from kindergarten	45 (83.3)	152 (85.4)	0.02
Attend kindergarten registration	46 (85.2)	165 (92.7)	0.37
Attend a kindergarten open house	52 (96.3)	166 (93.3)	0.24

Participants' opinions regarding the open-ended question, 'What are/were the primary issues for your child as he/she transitioned to kindergarten?' were examined. The families' answers to this question were grouped under six themes: adaptation, behavioural problems, self-expression,

distraction, being active and self-care. It was determined that the emphasis on school, friend and teacher harmony came to the fore in the responses of the participants regarding the theme of adaptation. For example, statements such as, P10, *'Will he/she get used to the school, will he/she like the teacher? I'm worried'* and *'Frankly, the process of him/her getting used to his/her school and his/her friends makes me think, whether he/she will adapt or what kind of a process is waiting for us. He/She cannot easily get used to his/her friends, and mothers sometimes come to me with complaints'*. P91 supports this situation. Under the theme of behavioural problems, parents mentioned some of their children's behavioural issues. Participant P161 stated, *"He/she is a little aggressive child, and he/she reacts immediately. I think he/she will have problems in his/her new school because of this situation' as their opinion.* P115 and P193, on the other hand, stated that their children had problems with obeying the rules and P115 stated *'We have difficulties in obeying the rules, therefore there is a problem. Now, the same process can start again in the new class, he/she does not accept rules easily'*. Within the scope of the self-expression theme, families stated that their children cannot express themselves. In this theme, a difference was found between the views of families with and without CSN. Parents of CTD said their children cannot express themselves due to their temperament. The statement, *'He/she is a very introverted, timid child, it is difficult for him/her to adjust. In this process, he/she cannot explain or express himself/herself'* of P108 is an example of this situation. Families with CSN associated the inability to express themselves with the child's disability. P51 said, *'He/she has problems with speech and perception. Therefore, he/she cannot express himself/herself to his/her friends and teachers in the classroom; in turn, he makes himself/herself more passive'*, and P39 said, *'Due to his/her asthma disease, he/she did not stay in stuffy, dusty, crowded environments, so he/she remains very shy in groups of friends; he/she may have trouble expressing himself/herself in the classroom environment'*.

Another theme derived from the participants' views was distraction. Families explained that there may be problems related to distraction, whether the children are diagnosed or not. P12's *'While doing homework and activities we have difficulties. He/she gets bored very quickly, and is indifferent'*, and P173's *'He/she cannot pay attention to anything for a long time, him/her being distracted worries me. His/her interest passes very quickly. He/she avoids taking responsibility'* views are examples of this situation. Under the theme of being active, as seen in P198's statement, *'I have some hesitations about him/her adapting to other friends because he/she is so active'*, families explained that their children may have problems due to being active. Under the self-care theme, problems with nutrition and toilet requirements were identified. Some families stated that they had problems with nutrition, and P171 stated *'He/she has food allergies, we may have problems with nutrition at school'*, explaining that the child may have nutritional problems due to allergies. Some families stated that their children could not meet their toilet needs in different environments outside the home. P145's statement, *'He/she has a toilet problem. When we go somewhere, he/she does not go to the toilet and he/she constantly cries'* is an example of this situation.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the experiences and involvement of families of children with and without disabilities in the transition to kindergarten. In line with this purpose, firstly, the study addressed the concerns of families in the transition to kindergarten. The study found that both family groups are most concerned with are similar. The situation that both families with CSN and families with CTD are most worried about was the item 'getting used to a new school'. McIntyre et al. (2007) also found this as the most worried about item in their study. At the same time, it overlaps with the adaptation theme findings obtained from the open-ended question in the research. McIntyre, Blacher, and Baker (2006) stated that CSN experience more adaptation problems in the transition to kindergarten than children with typical development. Bakkaloğlu (2013) examined the lives of families of CSN who switched from early intervention to preschool education in a qualitative study. In the study, families stated that they faced the problem of their children being unable to adapt to the new environment or group and being rejected by their peers. The research findings reveal the importance of what awaits the child and family in the new school, the importance of preliminary information about the new educational environment and the necessary skills for the child in this environment. The absence of transition

planning practices for the new educational environment makes it inevitable to experience problems in adaptation. Therefore, it is thought that supporting families and children with transition practices for the next educational environment will reduce their concerns about adaptation to school in general.

In the study, the items ‘Child being ready for kindergarten’, ‘getting along with teacher’ and ‘getting along with other children’ were among the three other common items that families worry about the most. It was found that families with CSN have concerns about academic skills and following instructions, whereas families with CTD indicate the separation from the family. The literature supports the research results (McIntyre et al., 2007; McIntyre et al. 2010; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta & Cox, 2000; Welchons & McIntyre, 2015). McIntyre et al. (2010) identified following the instructions and academic skills as areas of concern for families with CSN. Academic skills support the success of the student by facilitating adaptation to the classroom (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Harper, 2005), but for CSN, social skills as well as academic skills (Chadwick & Kemp, 2002; Johnson et al. al., 2000; Harper, 2005; Kemp & Carter, 2005) and having communication competence (Johnson et al., 2000; Kemp & Carter, 2005) are significant in-class and life skills in the transition process. The families’ answers to the open-ended question support this situation. Therefore, these concerns of families are significant. Similar to the findings of the research, Welchons and McIntyre (2015) stated that families with CSN have more anxiety in all items other than separation from the family than families with CTD.

Another finding obtained from the research is that both family groups have the opinion that they require certain needs in the transition process and that these needs will help them in transitioning. Whether they have a child with disabilities or not, the types of knowledge preferred by both family groups are similar. When the opinions of the families were examined, the item ‘what caregiver can do to prepare for transition’ was determined as the most requested information type by families with children with special disabilities. This item is also the second most requested information type for the other family group. The communication, relationship and mutual information support of families with specialists and other families are defined as indicators of the adaptation of the child and the family to the new environment (Malone & Gallagher, 2009; Rous et al., 2007). It is emphasised that the family should be guided and supported through the consideration of the needs of the family in the transition process, including family training and ensuring family involvement in the educational setting support the preparation of the family for the transition (Rosenkoetter, Hains, & Fowler, 1994; Stoner et al., 2007). Chadwick and Kemp (2002) stated that families with CSN are anxious, stressed, angry and disappointed due to the lack of knowledge, the suitability of the placement, lack of sufficient support and loneliness during the transition process, and the support and participation offered to the family are very important for the family to support the child. In the study, information about the child's new teacher is the item most preferred by families with CTD. This type of information is also seen as significant for families of CSN. In their study, McIntyre et al. (2007) found information on the child’s new teacher as the second most preferred type of information by families. The concerns and needs expressed by the families reveal that they need to be prepared and informed for the transition process. Practices carried out within the scope of the adaptation program in Turkey are not included in the scope of transition planning and transition activities. These adaptation programs carried out a few days prior to the starts of schools and it is mostly for children. Also these programs are planned as children’s familiarization to school, to teachers and children and children’s socialization with them. There are no practices covering a certain transition period for the families to know their roles and responsibilities, learn how to support their children, and obtain information about the teachers in this new environment. Therefore, these views of families are considered as a necessary requirement. Planned transition practices that will be held at regular intervals during the transition to kindergarten or primary school will meet these needs of families.

In the study, the views of both family groups on family involvement types were generally similar. It was determined that the majority of families want family involvement practices in the transition period. However, in the study, the item ‘visit kindergarten class/elementary school’ was determined as the most requested family involvement type by families with CTD and ‘attend a kindergarten open house’ by families with CSN for the transition to kindergarten. This finding is

thought to be related to the need for families with CSN to get to know the school more closely, to meet families and to share information through such activities. The finding regarding the type of family involvement that families prefer the most in this study differs from other studies (McIntyre et al., 2007; McIntyre et al. 2010; Quintero & McIntyre, 2011; Welchons & McIntyre, 2015). Turkey not yet having a systematic transition policy and application can explain this situation. Families are not involved in a team, planning and activities in the transition process. Therefore, they do not have the experience of being a member of the transition team or taking part in transition meetings. Pianta et al. (1999) stated that child- and family-oriented transition practices such as school visits and meetings may be more beneficial than other written methods (e.g. fliers, letter).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study, which examined family experiences and involvement in the transition to kindergarten, concluded that, the areas that all families worry about are similar. Both family groups find information and family involvement useful in the transition process. It has been determined that families with CSN, especially the person responsible for the child's care, need more information about what to do in the transition. Families specifically preferred the family involvement types of meetings and visits. The findings obtained from the study show that all families, whether they have a child with disabilities or not, want practices related to the transition. It is thought that the practices and participation types preferred by families will have a significant impact on future transition plans. In addition, it is thought that with these legal and planned transition policies and practices, the concerns of families can be eliminated.

The families involved in this study represent a certain region. Different regions in the country can be determined, and research can be applied to a wider family group. Another limitation of the study is that only parents' views were taken. With quantitative and qualitative research involving teachers and school administrators, together with families, the information in the field can be enriched. Individualised transition programmes can be prepared by considering the experiences of families, the transition practices they mentioned and family involvement types, and the effectiveness of these programmes can be investigated through experimental studies.

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